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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 VILNIUS 000139

SIPDIS

ECA/A/E/EUR FOR SCOTT RIGHETTI

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [CASC](#) [PREL](#) [CVIS](#) [CMGT](#) [ASEC](#) [LH](#)

SUBJECT: A/S HARTY'S MEETING WITH GOL CONSULAR OFFICIALS

PRODUCES RESULTS FOR AMCIT RESIDENTS

REF: (A) 04 VILNIUS 1548, (B) VILNIUS 79

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - NOT FOR INTERNET

1. (U) Summary: Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs Maura Harty met with Lithuanian Vice Foreign Minister Zenonas Petrauskas and Consular Department Director Vaidotas Verba on February 2, 2005. The MFA demonstrated its plans for biometric identity documents and suggested a potential solution to help alleviate AmCit problems with residency permits by utilizing an existing long-term visa. Since the GOL is having problems providing consistent and adequate consular services to the growing numbers of Lithuanians living abroad, A/S Harty offered to host a visit and to work with our Foreign Service Institute in the event they accepted the offer. A/S Harty also expressed concern regarding long delays in returning U.S. drivers' licenses surrendered by AmCits to obtain Lithuanian licenses; her efforts resulted in the liberation later in the day of 19 drivers' licenses by the GOL. End Summary.

A Strong Relationship, With a Few Minor Hiccups

2. (U) All participants agreed that the bilateral relationship and level of cooperation between the USG and GOL is very strong and allows us to resolve most issues before they become serious problems. However, there are several persistent irritants that affect the quality of life for AmCits resident in Lithuania.

Migration/Visa issues

3. (U) One of the most frequent requests received from resident AmCits is whether the cumbersome, inconsistent process of obtaining residency permits could be streamlined (ref A). While reshaping the Migration Department will be an ongoing task for the GOL, Verba proposed an alternative that may ease the hardships on AmCits (ref B). He described a long-term visa (a "D" visa) that can be obtained at a Lithuanian Embassy or Consulate in the United States before departing. This visa allows the holder to be in Lithuania for six months or longer without penalty, compared with the three month permitted stay for visa-free entry. Since the visa is valid for a longer stay, AmCits can remain in status during the typical six-month time period required to obtain a residency permit. Verba assured us that this visa can be issued in seven working days or less at embassies or consulates.

Emptying out the Drivers' License Drawer

4. (U) Any AmCit who applies for a Lithuanian driver's license is required to surrender their U.S. license to the road police. The road police, after verifying the validity of the license, should submit it to the MFA, who will return it to us. In theory, this should take no longer than a few days. In reality, several months will transpire without our ever seeing a single license at the Embassy. After A/S Harty raised this issue with Verba at 11:00 A.M., a package from the MFA was received at 4:00 P.M. containing 19 returned drivers' licenses.

Biometric Identity Documents

5. (U) Verba provided a short description of the new Lithuanian diplomatic passport. MFA will use this as a pilot program for biometrically compliant documents. The passport will contain biometric fingerprint data on a 72kb Philips contactless chip. The passports are manufactured by Francois-Charles Oberthur Fiduciaire, which also produces visa foils for the GOL. Verba stated that the GOL will eventually require biometric fingerprint data in all passports, even if the EU does not mandate it. The GOL is not planning to use retina scans at this time.

Increasing demand for GOL Consular Services Abroad

16. (SBU) More and more Lithuanians are choosing to live abroad, especially after EU accession. There are large Lithuanian expatriate communities in Spain, Ireland, the UK, and the United States. GOL recently announced they will open a consulate in Spain due to the increasing number of Lithuanians residing there. This growing diaspora has dramatically increased demand for Consular Services from the GOL. It has also exposed the lack of consistency and experience in the Consular Corps. A/S Harty offered to share our experience in ensuring consistent procedures and customer service in over 200 different locations. She suggested that the MFA send representatives to observe consular training here, and to consult with CA on how we design our procedures. Petrauskas appeared intrigued by the suggestion, and mentioned that he may himself participate.

Visa Waiver? What Visa Waiver?

17. (U) Petrauskas mentioned Lithuania's desire to participate in the Visa Waiver Program almost as an afterthought, in the last two minutes of the meeting. A/S Harty affirmed that Lithuania is traveling on the right path, focusing on meeting the technical and security requirements of the VWP. She also referred to the meetings she held last year with several new EU member representatives, referencing the legal requirements to be eligible for the program.

Comment

18. (SBU) These two productive meetings reflect the strong cooperation we regularly receive from the GOL's Consular Department. Although the weight of the bureaucracy occasionally overwhelms its good intentions, the GOL's desire to facilitate travel and to maintain the strong bilateral relationship is clear. A good case in point was the drivers' license episode, in which Ambassador Harty's ability to reach to the top of the GOL consular service resulted in the liberation of several missing Amciti drivers' licenses.

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